Ready for action – MPAs and the ATCM

ECO wants to highlight the excellent work conducted by the Antarctic Treaty Secretariat in gathering information about the crucial steps taken by the CEP/ATCM towards creating a network of marine protected areas (MPAs) in the Antarctic.

The compendium produced by the Secretariat is an excellent tool, and reflects the time and effort that have been invested by ATCPs towards the protection of marine biodiversity and ecosystems in Antarctica since 1998. This document shows that there is a solid platform to use as the basis for taking concrete actions towards the creation of a representative system of MPAs by 2012.

ECO urges ATCPs to translate this preparatory work into specific actions when revising the work plan of the CEP and to work together towards a comprehensive system of terrestrial and marine protected areas. In that context, ECO welcomes the recommendations adopted by the CEP to improve the management of existing ASMAs and for the implementation of new ones.

As the CEP has shown a willingness and commitment to work in close collaboration with SC-CAMLR, it is important that specific actions reflecting how this collaboration will take place are included in the new 5-year work plan of the CEP.

Finally, ECO urges ATCPs to make effective use of the Brest MPA workshop to progress the work that is necessary to ensure that an initial MPAs network can be designated by November 2012. This will help ensure that the words and the spirit of the agreements and conventions that make up the Antarctic Treaty System are matched with appropriate action.

WORLD OCEANS AT RISK
An international team of scientists has released a report, *International Earth system expert workshop on ocean stresses and impacts*, on the state of the oceans this week. Their conclusions are sobering. The report, issued by International Programme on the State of the Ocean (IPSO), in partnership with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), was the result of a workshop held earlier this year at which a group of ocean experts discussed the threats and stresses faced by world oceans. Those interested in reading the report can find it at [http://www.stateoftheocean.org/](http://www.stateoftheocean.org/).

In terms of the Antarctic, the report does not downplay the dire state of affairs with respect to ice sheets, which are melting at rates
predicted by the IPCC’s worst case scenarios. Yet at the same time it seems public interest in climate change is waning. Leadership from key decisionmakers is urgently required to explain the threats to the world if Antarctic ice sheets continue to melt so that the public will support the policies necessary to control emissions and reduce the negative impacts associated with climate change.

The workshop further found that the various stresses experienced by the ocean – climate change, overfishing, ecosystem damage – act in a “negatively synergistic way,” each compounding the effects of the others. These stresses have led to acidification and warming, and increasing hypoxia or “dead zones” with too little oxygen – conditions that in the past preceded mass extinction events. Though the ATCM cannot address these issues alone, ATCPs have a golden opportunity to work with their colleagues during the meeting to take action regarding climate change. The outcome of the ATCM can have a significant impact on the work done in other fora in which Parties participate. The need to make progress is urgent – we can’t afford to wait much longer.

ANNIVERSARY OF MADRID PROTOCOL: RAISING THE BAR ON IMPLEMENTATION

With annual compliance in reporting on Protocol obligations from consultative parties at 65%, ECO looks forward to a surge of reporting in the anniversary year of the Madrid Protocol. Thanks to the United States for flagging and seeking redress of the problems related to reporting via the Electronic Information Exchange System. Making the system easier to use will result in a higher rate of timely reporting while shortening the need for the number of IPs.

ECO looks forward as well to timely inspections of all national stations and the addressing of noted compliance problems as a result of inspections. The goals of the Madrid Protocol cannot be met if potential environmental risks from deteriorating structures and improper disposal of wastes are not dealt with. ECO salutes Australia and Japan for their excellent inspection reports. The reports contained some sobering information about how the requirements of the Protocol are often not being met. ECO encourages Parties to see these inspection reports as an opportunity to improve their operations and fulfill all their obligations under the Protocol.

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